

## GOD IN NATURE AND IN HISTORY.

### CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD A TRUE THEORY OF REVELATION.<sup>1</sup>

THE process of Revelation must, doubtless, be mysterious to us so long as we know God only "in part"; and that is equivalent to saying, so long as this world shall last—perhaps even so long as man continues finite. Revelation is the meeting of God and man, their coming into relationship, and man's recognition of this fact. Hence the process of Revelation can be clearly understood only in so far as both terms of the relationship are clearly understood. If, therefore, we know God only "in part," our knowledge of the process of Revelation can be no more than partial either. There is, therefore, no hope of closing finally the question of Revelation. Yet as our knowledge of God increases in breadth and clearness, so ought our knowledge of the manner of his self-revelation to grow. We are not entitled to give up the problem because it can never be solved save "in part;" it is our duty to be constantly revising our approximations, and, if possible, bringing them still nearer the truth. It is culpable negligence on our part to rest satisfied with any one approximation, if there seem to be materials for a more correct solution.

What, then, is the problem of Revelation? We understand it to be this: What took place in the mind of Moses,

<sup>1</sup> An earlier contribution to this Theory—which, unhappily for us, the learned author did not live to complete—will be found in an essay on "The Call and Commission of Isaiah" contained in Vol. xi. of the *First Series* of this Magazine. This paper, however, like that, is complete in itself, though both were intended to be parts of a larger whole; but this, alas! unlike that, cannot have the advantage of the author's corrections.

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David, Isaiah, etc., when they said, "The Lord spake unto me." What was their experience at these times? and specially, what was the particular point in their experience which made them ascribe what they felt, and the new knowledge that they gained, to God? The very nerve and core of the problem is, How did they apprehend God? What led them to attribute their experiences to God? To state in terms of ordinary experience how inspired men felt, and what passed in their minds, when they received a revelation, would be to give a complete explanation of the process of Revelation.

The object of these "Contributions" is to analyse some instances of the apprehension of God on the part of Old Testament writers, with a view to lay bare their real psychological character, and thus to obtain some answer to the above questions. The instances will be chosen chiefly from the Psalms. For we think that if light regarding the process of Revelation is to be looked for from any part of Scripture, it is from the Psalms. In the Law and in the Prophets, we have simply the results of Revelation presented to us in the finished state, as it were, as *revealed truth*, in the form of divine laws or of definite divine messages. It is only, or at all events, it is chiefly, in the Psalms that we are permitted to look into the minds of inspired men whilst apprehending God—only here that we see Revelation *in the making*. The Psalms introduce to us the subjects of Revelation telling their own experiences, and hence the process is more open to analysis here than anywhere else.

#### I. ON THE APPREHENSION OF GOD IN NATURE.

We begin with some investigations on a well-defined group, the Nature-Psalms as they are called. Psalm xxix. gives us the celebrated description of a thunderstorm. The writer is watching the storm as it passes over Pales-

tine from north to south; he sees the trees splintered and uprooted (Verses 5, 9*b*), the forked flames of the lightning (Verse 7), the pouring rain (Verse 3), the very mountains appearing to skip like "the wild bull" (Verse 6), by reason of the accompanying earthquake (Verse 8); and the wild cattle in their terror, prematurely giving birth to their young (Verse 9): and it has been the "voice of Jehovah"<sup>1</sup> that has done it all. He therefore calls on "the sons of God" (Verse 1) to praise Jehovah as He deserves—Jehovah, in whose palace everything that is, cries, Glory!

The Psalm describes the thunderstorm as a theophany, therefore. In all the various phenomena the Writer apprehends Jehovah's presence; he ascribes them all to the "voice of Jehovah"—a phrase which is six times repeated, and evidently applied to the peals of thunder. The chief interest of the piece in connection with the theory of Revelation will therefore centre in the explanation of this phrase. In what sense is the thunder "the voice of Jehovah"? What thought does the Psalmist desire to express by that phrase? It is perhaps not unlikely that, even before this particular Poet used it, the phrase, "the voice of Jehovah," was in Hebrew a current name for the thunder: at the same time there is nothing to prove that; and, if it were proved, the question would still remain: what fact was meant to be expressed when first the phrase was coined? How did the first apprehension of God in the thunder take place? and what was the real character of that apprehension?

We venture to lay down the thesis, that the Poet did not mean thereby to give us any information about the physical cause of the thunder, that the state of mind from which the apprehension of God resulted was not that of mere scientific curiosity about the cause of the observed pheno-

<sup>1</sup> The force of the following analysis will not be at all weakened if any one prefers to render יהוה קול with Ewald, "Hark! Jehovah is . . ."

mena. He does not mean, we think, to say that the thunder is caused by God speaking, just as the articulate sounds called words are produced by men speaking. Had the phrase "the voice of Jehovah" been meant as an explanation of the cause of the thunder, it would have been a degradation of God to the level of man, by bringing Him within the sphere of the sensible, by co-ordinating Him with the creatures, and thus destroying his infinite and transcendent character. One sound, a word, is produced by a man; another, inarticulate, is the roar of a lion; a third, thunder, is God's voice. If so, as the sounds are co-ordinate in the sensible sphere, so must their causes be; and if man, lion, and God, are co-ordinate, they are mutually limiting, and God must be finite. Or even if it be argued that this metaphysical difficulty would not occur to the Hebrew, and if it be held notwithstanding that he may have actually have fancied the thunder to be caused by God speaking, still the real question is: Why did he suppose that it was God who spoke? Why did he not attribute the sound to any one of a multitude of causes that would at once occur to his imagination? If he merely wanted a cause for the thunder, why did he fall upon Jehovah, and not on a special genius of the thunder? Or why did he not call the thunder the voice of the clouds? The fact that he selected Jehovah as the cause, shews that there was more in the inner experience of the Poet than a mere scientific curiosity. Or if it be said that the Hebrews recognized God in all that happens, believed God to be the one Agent everywhere working (see below on the Nineteenth Psalm), and that of course therefore the thunder was his work, the question is only pushed back a step, not answered. The only question relevant to the theory of Revelation is, How did the Hebrews come to ascribe all events to God? Why did they not ascribe the motions of the clouds to the clouds, the motion of the stars to the stars themselves, and so on? Or, if the half-savage mind

has a natural tendency to personify, why did they not, like the Greeks, attribute each motion of cloud, fountain, river, and tree, to its own special nymph or genius? The fact to be explained is that the Hebrews apprehended *the one Jehovah* in all these motions; and that fact can never be explained from the mere scientific curiosity, natural to man, regarding the causes of phenomena.<sup>1</sup> In later ages, no doubt, when everything suffers by becoming conventional, people may have understood the consecrated phrase, "the voice of Jehovah," as expressing the actual way in which the thunder was caused; and then the first shock of the conflict between Science and Religion would be felt when it was hinted that the thunder was caused by perfectly impersonal agencies, such as discharges of electricity; but this cannot have been the original meaning.

The phrase, as we see, is the central expression in a context, not only not scientific, but highly poetical; and, more than that, it is the centre of an elevated religious hymn of praise. The Writer is evidently in a state of enraptured religious communion; and his words must be explained as the outcome of that state. He is not in the passionless and prosaic state of seeking an explanation of the thunder; he is expressing religious experience of the most exalted kind. It is not his reason or understanding that is active; but, as the whole hymn shews, his spirit, his religious nature. The phrase coined on the occasion, or at least selected as most appropriate to the occasion, must accordingly be meant to shew *the effect produced in his religious experience* by the sight of the thunderstorm. The thunder is Jehovah's voice to him, because in the thunder

<sup>1</sup> All the attempts of the Evolutionist school to explain the origin of Religion from the "causal impulse" make shipwreck on this same rock. The scientific impulse is totally different in kind from the religious; mere curiosity about causes can never grow into religious emotion. The nations most advanced in religion, like the Hebrews, have been all but totally without scientific abilities. See Pfeiderer: *Religionsphilosophie nach geschichtlicher Grundlage*, p. 318 seqq.

Jehovah speaks to him, because the effect of the thunder is an awakening of his religious nature, a setting of him face to face with God, an excitation of religious emotion. Each peal that echoes and re-echoes from heaven to earth stirs the Poet's inmost religious nature, that shrine of his heart where Jehovah alone dwells. The deep thrill that passes through his soul as he stands watching the storm could be produced by Jehovah alone. It is an emotion essentially religious, not æsthetic, and not scientific; and this he can express in no other way than by saying that Jehovah caused it. The emotion is, he feels, the same in kind as that which arises within him when God deigns to visit his soul with his Divine Presence.

The evidence for Jehovah's connection with the thunder is, therefore, not of a kind that science can criticise, and any conflict between science and religion in the matter arises from misunderstanding. Science can neither prove by Bridgewater Treatises, nor disprove by *Systèmes de la Nature*, the Psalmist's assertion that the thunder was to him Jehovah's voice; because what he means to assert is not anything as to the physical cause of the thunder, but simply the fact that his spirit recognized and apprehended God in the thunder, that he was thrown into a state of religious emotion by it. The only verification of his words that is possible is to be had by letting other such spiritual men as he contemplate the same magnificent scene, and seeing whether they experience the same religious emotions. The thunder is admittedly a natural event, produced according to ascertainable laws; but if, in connection with it, the spectator is thrown into a state of religious emotion, then it is a theophany. Thus far, then, we are forced to the conclusion that a revelation of God is to be identified not by anything extraordinary in the *physical causation* of the event which is its medium, but simply by the presence or absence of religious excitation.

This explanation may be set in a clearer light if we refer briefly to the similar phrase "the mount of God" applied to Horeb (Exod. iv. 27; xviii. 5; Num. x. 33; 1 Kings xix. 8). This mountain was evidently sacred in the estimation of the Israelites long before Moses stood upon it to receive the Law. Already, during the residence of Moses in Midian, we find it called "the mount of God" (Exod. iv. 27).<sup>1</sup> What can this name mean? What should make the Israelites fancy that God was connected with this mountain in any more special way than with others? There was nothing that we know of in the patriarchal history to indicate such a connection. It was not that God had ever appeared there to their forefathers; and yet they seem to have regarded it as in some sense God's seat; for in many poetical passages (*e.g.*, Deut. xxxiii. 2; Judg. v. 4; Ps. lxxviii. 7; Hab. iii. 3), when God is represented as interfering to help or save his people, He *comes from Sinai* to the place where He is to meet them. And when Elijah, disheartened by ill-success, flees from his work (1 Kings xix.), and demands to see God again, it is to Sinai that he has recourse. Now it cannot have been in any mere physical or material sense that they conceived God to be seated there. True religious feeling cannot conceive that God is limited to a certain spot of earth. Or even if these Hebrews did think so, what we have to do with is the reason why they at first formed this opinion; for it is there that the original apprehension of God lay. Any mere visible or sensible connection of the mount with God in the pre-Mosaic times, by a visible theophany or any supernatural character of the mount itself, is against the whole history. Horeb can have been the seat of God only in the same way as the thunder was his voice. It was his seat

<sup>1</sup> Moreover the demand made for leave to go and worship God in the Desert (Exod. v. 1; x. 8, etc.), implies the sacredness of the mountain, even before the Exodus.

because one could not look on it without having experience of God, without feeling the same awe and reverence as are felt at the contemplation of God, the same emotions in general as characterize communion with God. The natural qualities of the mountain are therefore the explanation of its being called "the mount of God," just as the natural emotional qualities of the thunderstorm explain its being called God's voice. The grandeur and majestic appearance of the mountain, especially conceivable if the modern *Jebel Serbal* be, as *Lepsius*, *Ebers*, and others think, the mount of God (see *Stanley's* "Sinai and Palestine," pp. 40 ff., 72 ff.) fill the beholder with religious emotions. Where the human soul has, as it were naturally and inevitably, the emotions that are connected with the apprehension of God, there is the seat of God. To say that a certain place is God's seat, or home, either means that the place is such that religious emotions are inevitably raised (in persons susceptible of such emotions) by being there, and looking on the place; or it is to localize God, and so to make an idol of Him. God's seat is not where He can be seen by the bodily eye; He is invisible Spirit; but where He can be seen by the spiritual eye, the only organ whereby He can be perceived at all. To perceive God is to be religiously moved; and his seat is where we are religiously moved.

We are thus led, in seeking an explanation of the apprehension of God in splendid natural phenomena, to think of spiritual facts perfectly well-known to us; viz., of the intimate connection between the highest æsthetic perceptions and the religious emotions. The two are such that, given a person susceptible of religious emotion, the lower may at any moment pass into the higher. We have only to recall *Coleridge's* "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni," to get a modern example of what is meant:



“O dread and silent mount! I gazed upon thee  
Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,  
Did'st vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer  
*I worshipped the Invisible alone.*”

The state of mind indicated in the choice of these names, “the mount of God,” “the voice of Jehovah,” is therefore one in which the natural emotions connected with beauty and grandeur, in mountain or in storm, are at once pushed beyond mere æsthetics, and become religious emotions; and then, just as the outward object which gives us the feelings of hardness, extension, and colour, etc., is called matter, so the outward scenes and events in connection with which religious emotions arise are called theophanies. Again, therefore, we argue that the distinguishing characteristic of a place or event in which God is apprehended is not anything supernatural in its phenomenal character, but merely the power which it has of arousing religious emotions and perceptions in religious men.

This interpretation is further confirmed by the parallel case of Bethel, which receives its name, “House of God” (Gen. xxviii. 19), in commemoration of an inward experience of a distinctly religious kind. Jacob changes the name of Luz to Bethel because he there experienced communion with God. For is not the meaning of his dream-revelation this, that he finds God nearer to him than he had thought, even after leaving his home; that he finds a constant spiritual method still left him whereby he may enter into God's presence and have communion with Him at any time? Clearly the whole fact on Jacob's side is the presence that night of the inward emotions and feelings which we associate with communion with God. That this communion took place not in the waking state, but in a dream, does not alter the fact. When he calls the place “House of God,” he intends to keep in mind that here he had communion with God. That experience shewed

him that the place was holy ground, that God dwelt there ; and in this way the place was consecrated as a place of Divine worship for after ages.

Similar reasoning will apply to Peniel or Penuel, "the face of God" (Gen. xxxii. 30), and to the custom of calling the Temple "the house of the Lord." It was so, because to go into the Temple and to be present at its services was, almost necessarily, to experience the religious emotion of God's nearness and presence.<sup>1</sup> Thus a church is to a Christian now-a-days as much a house of God as the Temple was to an Israelite.

Psalm xix. is another important "Nature Psalm." The glories of the fresh morning are its subject. "The heavens are telling (קִסְפָּרִים) true present, of pictorial presentation, not "tell" of habitual action, which would have been perfect or imperfect) the glory of God, and the firmament shewing forth the work of his hands. Day unto day is pouring out (*lit.* "welling up" as a fountain) speech, and night unto night declaring (*lit.* "breathing out") knowledge. There is no speech, and there are no words ; their voice is not heard (*i.e.*, there is no audible sound). Over all the earth is their voice (reading קָלָם with Olshausen and Gesenius for קָוָם) gone out, and to the end of the world their words ; for the sun he has set a tent in them. And he is like a bridegroom from his chamber (*i.e.*, the morning sun in freshness and gladsome vigour of youth is like a young man newly-married, and at the summit of his strength and happiness) ; he rejoices like a warrior to run

<sup>1</sup> It is but one step from this point to the explanation of such late phrases as that of Jonah iii. 3, עִיר גְּרוּלָה לְאֱלֹהִים "a *divinely* great city ;" Acts vii. 20, ἀσρεῖος τῶ Θεῶ, " *divinely* fair. Of course, in order to arouse the emotions of awe and reverence that are connected with God's presence, a thing must be somewhat out of the ordinary ; mere commonplace everyday sights cease to arouse any emotion. Hence things extraordinary are called "divine," as above, *i.e.*, such as might well give the emotions of God's presence.

his course (not "race":  $\text{פָּתָח}$ =path, orbit). From the end of the heavens is his out-going, and his circling course to their other end; and nothing is hid from his heat."

Great violence is done to this passage when it is made into an argument from design, or into any other kind of argument, to prove God's existence;<sup>1</sup> and just as much when it is made a mere æsthetic perception of natural beauty. Neither the one nor the other is at all in point here. The Psalmist is not philosophizing, nor is he merely enjoying beauty: he is in a religious state. It is not that his intellect is moved to argue, "There must be a God who made all this"; nor is it merely that his æsthetic faculty is moved to luxuriate in grandeur; his spirit, his religious nature is moved: he has an immediate apprehension, an intuition of God. He is looking on the freshness of the morning, and all that he sees is telling of God, bringing God before him. His soul is filled with the thought of God; the sky, the day, the night, the sun,—all are God's means of revelation; for, as he looks on them, he is at once in communion with God. There is no voice, no audible word; and yet he has Jehovah as present to him as if there were. Nor is this presence of Jehovah in nature's beauty any mere subjective fancy of his. Jehovah is not only present to him there and then; he knows that the same experiences are possible to every one who looks on the same or similar scenes. He cannot suppose them looking on such beauty without seeing God. Jehovah's revelation is for every one: his voice is gone out through all the earth. His teaching, his self-revelation, is, or may be, unless men

<sup>1</sup> Addison's rendering

"What, though in solemn silence all  
Move round this dark terrestrial ball;

\* \* \* \* \*

In *reason's* ear they all rejoice," etc.,

is totally wrong. It is just to the reason that they have no voice; their voice is to the spirit, the religious nature.

hinder it, as universal as the circling visits of the sun, which passes over the whole earth in its daily course.

It is this fact, that the Poet is in a state of religious emotion while looking on nature's beauty (cf. Coleridge, "I worshipped the Invisible alone"), which explains the possibility of his passing over at once to the second half of his hymn (whose subject, the praise of God's law, seems incongruous with the first half), and makes it at least quite possible that the two halves are really one Psalm. The praise of the Divine Law, that is the prophetic "instruction" by spoken or written word, would not be felt by a poet in the state described to be at all incongruous with his contemplation of natural beauty. His state of mind when thinking of God's law, and when looking on natural beauty, was essentially the same. Both were states of immediate apprehension of God; both were states of communion with God. Hence there need have been no abruptness to him in the transition from nature's glories to the glory of God's teaching. We have now lost this youthful freshness and naturalness of emotion in regard to natural beauty, and have the experience of communion with God usually only when meditating on properly spiritual subjects, only in the stiller moments of prayer and contemplation. Hence we feel the transition abrupt. But the Hebrew saint *had such communion when contemplating natural beauty*. God revealed himself to the Hebrew saint in natural beauty; or, to state the same thing from the other side, he apprehended God present in his soul when looking on the Beautiful. Hence even the prayer for preservation from "secret faults" and "presumptuous sin" (Verses 12, 13), is not in any way incongruous with the beginning of the Psalm. If the first half of the Psalm were a philosophical argumentation up to God, or if it were merely an æsthetic perception, then there would be abruptness in the transition to the Divine Law, and incongruity between the

parts ; but the beauty of nature brings an *immediate apprehension* of God to the Poet, not an argument ; and an apprehension *of God*, not merely a perception of beauty. God is revealed by nature's beauty in the same way as by the Divine Law.

In Psalm viii. we find the Poet looking on the nocturnal heavens ("moon and stars," Verse 3), and finding that these bring God before him. God's glory is all over the heavens as it is all over the earth. His heart is filled with the idea of God's glory as thus shewn ; and he wonders that this mighty and glorious One should ever "mind" men or visit them. The contrast between the calm, pure, silent stars, and noisy, bustling, paltry, and sinful men is so glaring ! And yet God has minded men and cared for them. He has given man dominion over all his other works, has made him second only to Himself in the empire of the universe (Verse 5, read "*for thou hast made him lack but a little of the divine*," i.e., hast made him next lower than Thyself, and only a little lower), with all things under his feet, as God's chosen companion. Whatever be the meaning of תִּפְאֵרָתוֹ (Verse 1), the context seems to make it clear that the English version "set thy glory above the heavens," and the similar ones of Ewald and Delitzsch, must be wrong, because the idea of God's glory being greater and more exalted than the heavens (cf. Ps. xxxvi. 5), is not in point here. What the context demands is an objective glory visible *on the heavens*, parallel to the glory of Jehovah's Name on the earth, in the first clause. Perhaps Hitzig's rendering is the best : "whose glory is extended over the heavens."

This Psalm adds but little that is new for our purpose, but it fully confirms the results we have already arrived at. The sight of the nocturnal sky is to this Writer an immediate apprehension of God, as the sight of the sky in its

morning glories was to the writer of Psalm xix. He looks on them, and at once sees God, and begins to contrast his all-glorious nature, as revealed by these works of his, with the paltriness and meanness of the inhabitants of the earth. It is not anything peculiar or unusual in the physical aspect of the heavens that makes him see God's work in their beauty. It is simply the ordinary perception of beauty become, in a religious man, a religious emotion, an apprehension of God. The ordinary beauty of the heavens is, so to speak, a constant theophany. There is no arguing up to God needed; the intuition is immediate. The Psalmist's religious nature is moved when he looks, without the intervention of any process of argument; and this fact can be expressed only by saying that the outward thing seen is God's glory, and God's majesty, spread out all over the heavens.

Psalm civ. is a highly developed "Nature Psalm" of considerable length, but being almost exclusively descriptive, it throws less new light on our problem than might have been anticipated. Verses 2-4 are perhaps the most important. "*Who clothest thyself with light as with a mantle—spreadest out the heavens as a tent-curtain. Who layeth the beams of his upper chambers (i.e., "state-rooms," the reception rooms in ancient Eastern houses being usually the ὑπερῶα, cf. Acts i. 13; xx. 8) on the waters; who maketh the clouds his chariot, who marcheth on wings of wind; who maketh winds his messengers, flaming fire his servants.*"<sup>1</sup> The light, then, is God's robe, the sky is his tent-curtain; his state-rooms are founded on the waters, i.e., on the heavenly ocean, the "waters above the firmament" of Genesis i. 7 (cf. Gen. vii. 11), whence also the rain comes down (Verse 13); "*who watereth the hills from his upper*

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the last verse, see Perowne, in *THE EXPOSITOR, First Series*, vol. viii. p. 461.

*chambers.*” Now in what sense are these metaphors to be understood? Surely the Poet cannot intend anything so totally insipid and meaningless as Dr. J. H. Newman (quoted by Perowne *in loco*) puts into Verse 4, viz., that the winds and the lightning are set in motion by the agency of angels behind the scenes. This is “the letter that killeth” *ad nauseam*, and even Dr. Newman’s eloquence cannot hide the grotesqueness of the conception. If so, we must go on to suppose that God really uses the sky as a tent-curtain, and shelters Himself behind it; that the light is his robe, so that if we analysed light properly we should find Him within it; that the thunder is caused by his speaking, and so on. Realism like this forgets that there is such a thing as poetry, and degrades all to the level of its own prose. But, more than that, it soon ends in mythology pure and simple. It makes God merely a man, magnified a little, but still subject to limitations like ourselves, occupying space, co-ordinate with other finite beings. On this side of the sky are men in their tents; on the other, God in his.

But no less prosaic and no less mistaken is the modern theologico-scientific explanation, which finds in these metaphors nothing more than an affirmation that God is the first cause of all the phenomena of nature. If what the Poet is concerned to do is to give a statement of the real first cause of all phenomena,—light, wind, fire, rain, etc.,—then his object is a scientific one, and by his science he must stand or fall. But we have seen that Verses 3 and 13 unquestionably imply as their basis the old Hebrew idea of an ocean above the firmament. Now science knows nothing of the existence of any such ocean, or, rather, it confidently denies its existence. Hence either the Poet is not concerned about scientific facts at all, or he is guilty of a mistake.

It is surely plain from the whole character of the Psalms, and of the Hebrew nation as a whole, that their chief con-

cern was not about science, but about religion. Hence the question for us to ask is not, What physical facts lie behind these metaphors? But, as everywhere in the Bible, What *divine revelation* is contained in them? What religious ideas do they express? Till the contrary is proved, we shall hold that the Bible is a revelation of saving truths, not of science. And the religious ideas intended by the metaphors before us can be nothing else than those which we have found in the Psalms already considered. The light is God's robe, because it suggests God to the religious mind. The heavens are his tent, his state-rooms are fixed above the starry firmament, just in the same way and to the same effect as the thunder is his voice, viz., in so far as no religious person can look on their grandeur and majesty *without being religiously moved*. The winds, and the fire, and the lightning are God's messengers and servants, because, when men look on the lightning, or are visited by the tempestuous wind, their hearts at once thrill down to the roots. The wind and the storm seem to speak straight home to the heart, and thoughts of God at once arise. This being so, the whole intention of the metaphors being to express religious facts, and not scientific facts, the popular conception as to the heavenly ocean, in spite of its unscientific character, is as apt and as unobjectionable a metaphor for the Psalmist to use as any other.<sup>1</sup>

The Verses that follow in the Psalm merely expand and enforce the same theme by means of a detailed description of the creation. This is gone over very much in the same order as in Genesis i. First the separation of land and water (Verses 6-9); creation of birds and beasts of the field (Verses 10-12); the rain coming down from the state-rooms

<sup>1</sup> In the same way Job (Chapter iii. 8) uses a phrase borrowed from popular mythology, when he says, "Let those who ban days ban it, who are of skill to rouse the Dragon" (some mythical monster of the sky. See Cox, *in loco*). He does not thereby give any sanction to the belief in the existence of such a monster.



of God (Verse 13); and as the result, grass growing and food for man and beast (Verses 14-16), etc., etc. All this is ascribed to Jehovah's agency; his hand appears in all these phenomena alike. That is to say, in every part of nature, in all that passes before the eye of man, the Hebrew saint could see Jehovah. His spirit was stirred by seeing it all, and religious feelings and the emotions of communion with God were aroused.

Psalm cxxxix. is not strictly a "Nature Psalm," but it may be taken here as it falls naturally in with the above. Its theme is the omniscience and omnipresence of God. These two divine attributes are expressed under various metaphors. "*Whither can I go from thy Spirit? and whither can I flee from thy Presence? If I should climb to heaven, there art thou: if I should make my bed in Sheol, lo, thou art there. If I should take the wings of morning [personification] and dwell in the uttermost west, even there would thy hand lead me, and thy right hand hold me,*" etc., etc. Above or below, in the extreme east or in the extreme west, God would be equally near to him. Now the Writer is evidently giving us a meditation of his own, half prayer, half poem. He is not giving us, with a "Thus saith the Lord," the formulated result of a past revelation made to him in the form of a doctrine of God's omniscience and omnipresence. The revelation is going on as he writes: he does not need to go further than his own present consciousness to find out the doctrine he is enunciating, and hence he quotes no other authority; the immediate certainty of his own experience is enough. Whence, then, is he getting his knowledge? Is it not simply that his spirit, presently in communion with God, tells him that such communion is independent of time and place, that he can see God as now he sees Him anywhere and everywhere, nay, that he cannot run away from the experience, that he cannot find any place

where God would not be as near as He is now?<sup>1</sup> His present experience shews this, and the spirit's experience is the only proper evidence as to where God is, and where He is not, because God's being in a place means that religious men may have communion with Him there. When therefore the Hebrews spoke of God as "dwelling on Horeb" (see above), or as "dwelling in Zion" (Pss. cxxxii. 13, 14; lxxxvii. 2, etc.), and also spoke of Him as everywhere present, there is only a formal contradiction between the phrases, not a real one. The one thought completes the other, and for a full statement of doctrine both are needed. The real meaning is that, although on Horeb or in the Temple service at Jerusalem, the devout spirit is wont to experience communion with God more readily than elsewhere, yet it is also true that the devout spirit can have communion with God anywhere, indeed that the presence of God is sometimes so overpowering that the spirit feels certain it could not escape from the thought by any change of place. The omnipresence of God, therefore, is no material omnipresence; any such thing as "God's filling all space" is of course a contradiction in terms. God's presence or absence are religious, not spatial, ideas, and mean the presence or absence of the possibility of religious communion.<sup>2</sup>

This completes the indications afforded by the "Nature Psalms" of the way in which God was apprehended in natural phenomena. We see that what was beautiful suggested God to the mind of the Psalmists, threw them into states of religious emotion. No special physical characteristic of the things in which they apprehended God's presence can be found. The phenomena noted are simply

<sup>1</sup> See Lipsius : "*Evangelisch-protestantische Dogmatik*," §§ 302-306.

<sup>2</sup> See Calvin's Commentary on Verse 7. He also rejects the idea of a material or spatial omnipresence. "They misapply the passage who adduce it as a proof of the immensity of God's essence," etc. Eng. Tr., vol. v. p. 211.

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those that touch the soul with deep emotion ; no other characteristic is common to them all ; they are not susceptible of any other definition. We find, therefore, throughout all these instances, this result at least, that the apprehension of God is not a thing which comes under the cognisance of material science, and therefore it can neither be proved nor disproved by the aid of science. It is altogether a spiritual fact, an inward perception of the spirit. The physical or scientific interpretation of natural phenomena is quite independent of their religious interpretation ; they are of different spheres, and their propositions therefore can never come into collision. The astronomer who "has swept the heavens with his telescope and found no God" has not disproved God's existence, has not even disproved that "the heavens are telling the glory of God," any more than a man who has looked through a microscope at empty space and found no atmosphere, has disproved the existence of the air we breathe. It is not by the microscope that you can detect the presence of the air ; and it is not by the telescope, nor by the eye at all, however aided, that God is discerned. Why should not the spirit have the same right to be trusted, when its assertions are properly examined and understood, as any bodily sense ? Especially when, as we have seen, all that it means to assert is simply the undeniable fact that it *has* these perceptions of God ? The asseverations of science, that she can find no room for God in her sphere, only prove that there must be another sphere independent of her ; that there is a religious interpretation of phenomena independent of their scientific interpretation.

P. THOMSON.

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